



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

National Marine Fisheries Service, Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701

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PROPOSED RULE FOR CARIBBEAN COMPREHENSIVE AMENDMENT AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT

NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has published a proposed rule in the *Federal Register* to implement actions found in a comprehensive amendment submitted by the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Council). The proposed rule would implement actions to bring the Council's Spiny Lobster, Queen Conch, Reef Fish, and Coral Fishery Management Plans (FMPs) into compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. NMFS announced the availability of the comprehensive amendment in the *Federal Register* (70 FR 35053, June 16, 2005) and with an earlier Southeast Fishery Bulletin (NR05-031) on June 16, 2005, accepting comments on the amendment through August 15, 2005. NMFS is now requesting comment on the proposed rule through September 28, 2005. The proposed rule, if implemented, would make the following regulatory changes, briefly summarized below. Several actions in the amendment are non-regulatory in nature, thus are not in the proposed rule. These actions are included here to provide a more complete understanding of the regulatory actions.

Fishery Management Units (FMUs)

The proposed rule would redefine select FMUs found in the Council's various FMPs to include only those species found in sufficient numbers in the U.S. exclusive economic zone to warrant inclusion in Council FMPs, and retain additional select species in FMUs for data collection only.

Biological Reference Points and Stock Status Criteria

For all FMU sub-units, with the exception of those species included in a "data collection only" category, the amendment would establish or revise values such as maximum sustainable yield (MSY), optimum yield, fishing mortality rate and biomass level ratios, minimum stock size threshold, maximum fishing mortality threshold, and it would define limit and target control rules under which to apply these parameters.

Reductions in Fishing Mortality to Meet Rebuilding Strategies

Based on current estimates of the status of some stocks, or the establishment of new stock status criteria proposed in the amendment, several stocks would be considered overfished. The proposed rule would implement regulatory actions to rebuild those overfished stocks, and to protect other stocks from becoming overfished. These actions include several closed seasons, gear and harvesting restrictions, and administrative actions to foster the development of consistent regulations in state and federal waters.

Bycatch Reduction and Standardized Bycatch Reporting

The amendment proposes actions to improve U.S. Caribbean bycatch data collection for fisheries of the region. In addition, the proposed rule would establish management measures such as seasonal closures and gear restrictions, which would also reduce bycatch.

Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)

The amendment describes, identifies, and designates EFH and EFH habitat areas of particular concern for managed stocks. The proposed rule would establish anchoring and gear restrictions within designated EFH to minimize adverse effects on caused by fishing.

Contact Information, Dates, and Addresses

For further information, contact: Dr. Steve Branstetter, phone: 727-824-5305; fax: 727-824-5308; e-mail: steve.branstetter@noaa.gov. Written copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from NMFS's Southeast Regional Office, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida 33701. Electronic copies of the proposed rule may be obtained from the *Federal Register* web site at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/index.html> (70 FR 53979).

Written comments must be received no later than 5 p.m., eastern time, on September 28, 2005. Comments may be submitted via email, written correspondence, or fax. All comments received will be addressed in the final rule.

Comments may be submitted by the following methods:

E-mail: 0648-AP51.proposed@noaa.gov. Use 0648-AP51-proposed as the e-mail subject.

Federal e-Rulemaking Portal:

<http://www.regulations.gov>. Follow the instructions for submitting comments.

Mail: Steve Branstetter, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, Florida, 33701.

Fax: 727-824-5308, Attention: Steve Branstetter.

NMFS is dedicated to protecting and preserving the nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research, management, and enforcement. NMFS provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to customers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and providing stewardship to our nation's coastal and marine resources.

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NMFS is an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.